

WILLIAM SWAINSON TO JOHN JAMES AUDUBON.

(Hitherto Unpublished Letters.)

BY RUTHVEN DEANE.

THE following letters, covering dates between 1828-30, show, as in other letters of Swainson's which I have published, his crude method of writing and expressing himself. In Dr. Albert Günther's interesting address delivered at the Anniversary Meeting of the Linnæan Society of London, May 24, 1900, he writes: "Swainson was extremely careless in orthography and loose in his style of writing; he persistently misspelt not only technical terms, but also the names of foreign authors, and even of some of his familiar friends and correspondents." These letters were written at a period when he was deeply engaged in his literary pursuits, yet in a discontented and nervous frame of mind, mortified at the slow sale of his 'Zoological Illustrations,' his temporary embarrassment for funds, and his evident growing dislike for American naturalists.

I am under many obligations to Miss M. R. Audubon for the gift of three of these letters and to Miss M. Eliza Audubon for the loan of the others with permission to publish them.

NO. I.

Tuesday 11 Nov. 1828.

I had written the enclosed, my dear Mr. Audubon, before your letter of Monday reached me. It has come this instant. Dreams, you know, must be always interpreted *contrawise*, we might have lifted up our arms, as you saw in your dream but, if you had not awoken, it was no doubt to have shaken hands! But that my regard for you may be evinced, I will bring myself to lay under an obligation, which I would only ask from one of my own family. I was that moment thinking to which I should write, to ask the loan of 80£ for a few months, and now I will ask it of *you*. If you was aware of the peculiar feelings which we Englishmen have

on such occasions, perhaps you would smile, but so it is that we never ask any one, from whom we have the least idea of a refusal. Now, did I not believe you to be a sincere friend, do you imagine I should have told you I was in want of Money much less have asked you to lend me some. The fact is, I have suffered a severe loss during my being in Paris, what little I had *on hand*, has been spent there and in making preparations for the publication of my Zool. Illustrations. Two or three months however, hard work will bring me round again & repay you.

Let me see your letter to the President of Zool. Soc.¹ before it goes, and you shall see mine.

I shall be most thankful for the Grouse. I send 2 drawings to Havell to be engraved *spur him on* for I want to have every thing ready before the new year.

Yours most sincerely
W. Swainson.

John J. Audubon Esq.
79 Newman St.

No. 2.

Friday.

[No date given, probably 1828].

My dear Audubon,

I am rejoiced to hear you are safe and well, & I answer your letter immediately, for I have no prospect of going to London, for some weeks, nor could I expect on a matter of urgent necessity, for I am to have my first volume or "Preliminary Discourse" ready the first week in June under a penalty of 500 £.

As I cannot come to you, pray write me some few of the many things you want to say to me. When once this volume is done I shall have time to breath. You will find I have put your friend V.[igors] *hors de combat*.²

¹ Audubon was elected an original member of the Zoölogical Society of London, February 24, 1828.

² While in Paris in 1828 Swainson entered into a lively controversy with Vigors, and as Dr. Theodore Gill writes "a great fire was kindled from a very little flame." For a detailed account see 'Osprey,' Vol. V, No. 3, and subsequent numbers.

He is now part of O'Connell's¹ Political *tail*. Kind regards to Mrs. A. & your son.

Ever yours, most sincerely
W. Swainson.

J. Audubon Esq.
care of Mr. Havell,
77 Oxford St.
London.

No. 3.

18 January, 1829.

My dear Mr. Audubon,

I write this in utter uncertainty whether it will find you in London. My first number² has now been out three weeks — it has been seen and universally admired, and how many copies do you think the Publisher has sold? now pray guess as the Americans say. 100 — no. 50 — no. twentyfive, no. fifteen, no. ten? yes. positively ten copies and *no more*, has been sold. I blush almost to confess this mortification to even, *you*, but so it is. Now, my dear Sir, what am I to think of the “generally diffused taste” as the phrase is, for Natural History.³

This although vexing to *me*, may be a consolation to *you*, who are able to exhibit on what I call your *Red Book* the names of a

¹ An Irish political patriot. Born 1775, died 1847.

² Zoological Illustrations. 3 vols., 1820-23, with 182 colored plates by himself. Second Series. 3 Vols., 1832-33.

³ In the preface of ‘Zoological Illustrations,’ Second Series, Vol. II, 1831-32, Swainson writes: “Neither literature nor art has been encouraged in our opulent Island, half as much as they have been by some of the petty Kingdoms of the Continent. It is a melancholy fact, that while our present laws crush individual exertion, by extorting a large number of free copies of the most costly works, undertaken by their Authors without the slightest hope of remuneration, the Government of France assigns *for subscriptions* to such publications, an annual sum of £10,000. But on questions regarding the patronage of science, Great Britain, unfortunately, is poorer than any Nation in Europe.” This volume was dedicated to King Louis Philippe, of whom Swainson writes: “A true Patron to Science, munificently encourages, both privately and publicly, all who are engaged in its pursuit.”

good portion of 150 Subscribers to a 200 guinea Book. Think yourself my friend exceedingly well off.

The amount of sale must be kept silent, it would be a nice nut to crack for V[igors]¹. & his friends.

I shall be able to do without the water birds, if you have not found any.

I have had a most extraordinary letter from Waterton,² which will highly amuse you. The man is mad. — stark, staring, mad.

Yours very faith'ly

W. Swainson.

Can you tell me any safe expeditions made of sending and receiving letters and Parcels from Philadelphia.

J. J. Audubon Esq.
79 Newman St.
Oxford St.

No. 4.

Saturday, 1 May, 1830.

Welcome once more, my good friend to merry England:³

I had indeed heard from Havell,⁴ with the greatest pleasure, that you had safely landed at Liverpool; and I regret very much that you did not reach London before I left it; for I am now much seldomer in town than formerly, and I know not when I may have the power to do so again. My old and most valued friend Mr. Burchell⁵ has also, to my great delight, just returned

¹ Nicholas Aylward Vigors. Born 1787, died 1840. Naturalist. First Secretary of the Zoölogical Society of London.

² Charles Waterton. Born 1782, died 1865. For one of his most vindictive letters to Swainson, see his 'Essays on Natural History,' 1871, p. 511. This effusion is bitter from start to finish and contains some four thousand words.

³ Audubon sailed for America April 1, 1829 where he remained one year, returning in April, 1830.

⁴ Robert Havell. Engraver of Audubon's plates. Born November 25, 1793, died November 11, 1878.

⁵ William John Burchell. Explorer and Naturalist, who collected extensively in Brazil, Africa, and other countries. Born 1782, died March 3, 1863.

to England after *six years* spent in wandering over the Forests and Andes of South America bringing with him collections, that will make everything else in this country *sink into utter insignificance*, he too, is longing to see me, and if I possibly can get away for a day next week, with two such desirable objects I will, but my literary engagements bind me, hand and foot.

You think I do not know that you are an F. R. S.¹ — you are mistaken, furthermore, will you be surprised at knowing I have been fighting your battles against a rising opposition which originated among some of your *Ornithological friends* (at least so I strongly suspect) for the purpose of your name being *blackballed*. But more of this when we meet, such matters had better not be committed to paper.

The whole of your bundle of young trees reached me as withered sticks, not a spark of life in any one of them.

So you are going to write a book 'tis a thing of little moment for one who is not known, because they have no reputation to loose, but much will be expected from *you*, and you must, therefore, as the saying is, *put your best leg foremost*. I am coming fast round to the prejudice, as you may think it, against the Americans.

Dr. Richardson's and my own volume on the Arctic Birds,² is now at press. Not being able to refer to your plates, I have not had the power to quote your work, you know how repeatedly I have applied on this head, both to you and Mr. Havell in vain.

Prince C. Bonaparte³ has long promised me his second & third volume but they have never come. Ward⁴ is a regular *Scamp* he has taught me a good lesson — fool that he is — and that is, to steal my heart against distress such as his was, and to consult, like all the rest of the world, my own interest only. I am sick of the world and of mankind, and but for my family would end my days in the primeval forests of my beloved Brazil.

¹ Audubon was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of England, March 18, 1830.

² Fauna Boreali-Americana. Part II, 1831.

³ Charles Lucian Bonaparte. Born 1830, died 1857.

⁴ J. F. Ward. Swainson refers to him as an animal preserver of considerable talent.

So Mr. Lea¹ did not settle my account with you? I have found *him out*, also, to be no better than he should be. He also is one of your *friends* who would, if he could, cut your throat. Another *friend* of yours has been in England, Mr. Ord² and has been doing you all the *good* he can: if these are samples of American Naturalists, defend me from ever coming in contact with any of their whole race.

Mrs. Swainson's health I am grieved to say, has suffered much the last twelve months, she is now at Birmingham with the children. I have not failed to mention your kind inquiries after both, whenever Havell has a parcel for me, I hope you will occasionally accompany it with a few lines.

Yours my dear Sir very faith'ly
W. Swainson

John J. Audubon
at Mr. Havell's
79 Newman St.
Oxford St.

No. 5.

My dear Mr. Audubon:

I am still very poorly, but as I can put this under cover, I should wish to ask you, whether you would like to have a copy of my Illustrations,³ with the plain proof on India paper, there are only 10 printed for *private* Sale (to avoid the tax of Public Libraries)⁴ and I have just now one copy of the first volume bound up. Should you like it, you can return me the three numbers of the common edition. I shall then have greater hopes of possessing

¹ Isaac Lee of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, naturalist and publisher. Born 1792, died December 8, 1886.

² George Ord. Born 1781, died January 23, 1866. I quote from 'Audubon and his Journals,' Vol. 1, p. 56: "Mr. Ord was one of those (of the very few, I might say) who disliked the Naturalist from first to last, who was perhaps, his bitterest enemy."

³ 'Zoölogical Illustrations.'

⁴ They secure the Author the sole right to publish his works for twenty-eight years, upon the presentation of eleven copies to the public libraries of the Kingdom.

myself of your Gigantic book, some day or other ; at present one of my *volumes* only cost as much as one of your *numbers* !

Let me, as a friend, request you not to decide irrevocably on the subject of your book. I have thought upon it much since I saw you, and I want to find time to write you more fully upon it than I was able to speak, on the first consideration of the matter, particularly as I was then nervous and unwell.

I hope in 2 or 3 days to write you this, at present I am much hurried, and am expecting Sir W. Jardine¹ and Mr. Selby² every day.

Yours very Faith'ly

J. J. Audubon Esq.

W. Swainson

43 (Toy shop, corner house)

13 May 1830.

Great Russell St.

Bloomsburg ?

No. 6.

My dear Mr. Audubon.

Your letter perfectly surprised me. I thought you were wandering about Lancashire ! Have you been and returned or are you going. Why are you so sad ? I would lay ten shillings that old Havell has been disappointing you as he has done me. He is in matters of business a complete *daudle* — an old woman, and I have done with him. His son I think better of he has a good idea of punctuality in business. Still he also wants an occasional spur. I have been drawing Richardson's Grouse, but have not succeeded to my mind.

I am terribly hurried in preparing my first number. Pray desire Havell to hand you a copy, & to supply you every month with it. I am preparing a few sets of the old Series, and one will be sent to you, our exchange will then be fairly commenced.

I wrote very particularly to Pitois³ three weeks ago, and am surprised at having no answer. I shall come to town some of these

¹ Sir William Jardine. Born February 23, 1806, died November 21, 1874.

² John Prideaux Selby. English ornithologist. Author of 'British Birds.' Born July 23, 1788, died March 27, 1867.

³ M. Pitois, Paris, France. Acted as Audubon's Agent on the recommendation of Baron Cuvier.

days unexpectedly and surprise you. I cannot however bear that you should be "in the blues" at this season of merriment and festivity. If therefore you think it would give you pleasure, it certainly would to Mrs. Swainson and myself to see you at our Christmas dinner, where there will be only ourselves. The weather is remarkably fine, and the change air and scenes will invigorate & make you for the time forget those every day annoyances which we are all subject to.

If you come, have the goodness to let us know and I shall trouble you to bring with you everything which Havell has for me & which he will pack up in a parcel, your bed is quite ready.

I shall thank you also to buy me a pair of clogg springs, similar to the pattern sent.

In one of your walks I hope you have thought about the *French Wine* that we talked so much about and have ascertained the particulars from your friend, so that we may order a cask. I hope you have not mistaken the price, — for if not, nothing that can be drank in this country is one half as cheap. Mrs. Swainson & the little ones are quite well & all hope to see you soon.

Ever yrs faith'ly

W. Swainson.

Monday morn.g.

J. Audubon Esq.

No. 7.

My dear Mr. Audubon

I welcomed the news of your arrival in America yesterday, and as I am making up a packet for Liverpool today, I seize the opportunity of wishing you joy and happiness in the new world. I am surprised and disappointed as not receiving one line from Ward it is at the best negligent, and somewhat ungrateful. Hope you have begun your studies among the birds on a better plan than formerly, that is, in preserving the skins of every one on which there is the least doubt whether the bird is young or old, particularly the former. If you are to give scientific descriptions and definitions of the species this precaution is absolutely necessary. What your Americans do with their money I know not, Mr. Lea tells me he cannot procure one purchaser for my new Illustrations: *here* it now going on very well.

You asked me what you can do for me in America. I will tell you. Send me a cart load of shells from the Ohio, or from any of the *Rivers near New Orleans*. The *very smallest*, as well as the *very largest* — *all sizes*. I have been long expecting those which your son promised you for me near twelve months ago! *but I have heard nothing of them!* you may spend a few dollars for me and send people to fish the shells at the dry season, when the waters are *low*, that is the best time.

Things go on here much as usual, but I have not been in London since Xmas. The first volume, containing the Quadrupeds, of Dr. Richardson's work, is out. I am now busy in preparing the second, which contains the Birds. Let me particularly direct your attention to the manners of the Cedar Bird, *Ampelis Americana*. I suspect it feeds much on Insects in default of fruit, but what is desirable, is to know *the way* in which it captures Insects, whether as a flycatcher ie. by seizing them on the wing, or like the Gold crest — by picking them up among the branches or leaves. I am now in close correspondance with Charles Bonaparte, & a most valuable correspondant he is.

Mrs. Swainson is just recovering from her confinement after giving me another little son I am happy today they are both going on well.

Wilson I believe mentions *two* birds very like the Red eyed Flycatcher, this is a point deserving your attention, but the *manners* of these birds are much more important. I feel convinced there are several species of my Genus *Ammodramus* shore finch, in the So. States, they all have narrow pointed tails, like the sea-sidefinch of Wilson. I further suspect there is more than one species confounded with the Towee Buntling.

I hope soon again to hear more fully from you, and of your ornithological acquisitions. The dear little ones are quite well.

Yours very sincerely,

Wm. Swainson

The Green 26 June 1829.

Mr. John J. Audubon
care of

Mess. Thomas E. Walker & Co.
Merchants.
New York.

No. 8.

My dear Mr. Audubon.

I delayed not replying to your last letter soon after I received it, and it fortunately was sent to Havell the very day that he was making up a packet for you, I conclude therefore it has long ago reached you. I know not in what part of the Wilds of America you may now be wandering, but I hope you are fully intent upon your great object, and that you are not only making drawings, and taking notes, *but preserving Skins*, of all your little favorites. Don't forget the *Shrikes*, of which I have strong suspicions there are 2 or 3 species mixed up with the name of Loggerhead. Should you be in the land of the *Scarlet Ibis*, do pray procure a dozen or two of the best skins, they are the most magnificent birds of No. America, and are said to be common towards New Orleans.

You will learn from the Newspapers how uncommonly severe is our winter the snow has now been upon the ground five weeks and it is still falling. I manage, however to walk out every day, and thus have acquired better health than I have enjoyed for many years.

Previous to your embarking to England, which I hope you will do very early in the spring you must do me one favor. Bring me two Grey Squirrels alive, and a cage full of little birds, either the painted or non-Pareil finch the Blue finch, or the Virginian Nightingale, as they are called, 3 or 4 of each to guard against casualties by death on the voyage. I do not care one farthing whether they sing or not, so that I presume they may be got for a mere trifle. The Squirrels would delight the little people beyond measure, and would prove a neverfailing source of amusement to them. I believe you have other kinds than the *grey*, so that any will do. If you cannot get them pray supply their place by two Parrots of America.

We continue pretty well at the Green.¹ Seldom go to town, but I find people begin to discover the true character of V.[igors] and many that were formerly his friends now speak very differently

¹ Tittenhanger Green. Within a mile of the little village of London Colwey, Herts.

of him. His father having died the property has come to him. He has now taken a fine house in the Regents park, and holds *conversazioni* (in humble imitation of those of the President of the Royal Society) every Sunday evening *during the season*!! all this is very grand, and he appears to have abandoned writing any more papers on ornithology, since I have begun to point out his errors.

Ward wrote to me since my last, he is a poor weak fellow, with a good natural disposition, but so little to be depended upon, that he is turned round by every feather, after inserting that he could not go on "in my service" as he called it, under *ten dollars* a week, he now says he should be most happy to receive *four*. He says not one word of his marriage, which proves his wish to deceive one. I have done with him.

My Boxes are in possession of Mr. Gilpin & shall thank you to procure them from him, and bring them back for me, they will hold your own things on the voyage.

I hope you have got for me *lots of River shells*. Mrs. Swainson writes in kind wishes, and the little children often talk of you, and ask me when you will come back.

Your sincere friend

W. Swainson

30 Jany 1830

J. J. Audubon Esq.
care of Mr. Havell